

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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R 111330Z AUG 76

FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4086

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON

COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN

COMIDEASTFOR

NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA

NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI

CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0633

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ETRN ET

SUBJECT: SUBJECT: TRANSPORTATION UPDATE

1. SUMMARY: TRANSPORTATION, PARTICULARLY BY ROAD, CONTINUES TO BE MOST VULNERABLE ELEMENT IN THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IN ERITREA. ASIDE FROM AN ACTIVE TRAFFIC BETWEEN MASSAWA AND ASMARA, ROAD TRANSPORTATION BETWEEN ASMARA AND THE WEST AND SOUTH HAS COME TO COMPLETE HALD DURING THE LAST TWO MONTHS. DURING THIS SAME PERIOD, AIR TRANSPORTATION HAS BEEN SUBJECT TO SERIOUS DISRUPTIONS AND ALTERATIONS IN SCHEDULES, INCLUDING SUSPENSION OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICE AND SERVICE TO MASSAWA. SEA TRANSPORT HAS REMAINED GENERALLY CONSTANT ALTHOUGH A SLIGHT DECLINE IN SHIP ARRIVALS

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IN MASSAWA HAS BEEN REGISTERED IN THE LAST TWO MONTHS.

2. ROAD TRANSPORTATION: SINCE EARLY JUNE, COMMERCIAL CONVOYS IN AND OUT OF ASMARA HAVE BEEN LIMITED TO AN ACTIVE TRAFFIC TO AND FROM MASSAWA, WHILE THE ADDIS AND TESSENNEY ROUTES HAVE BEEN MORIBUND. FOLLOWING THE ARRIVAL IN ASMARA OF A LARGE CONVOY FROM ADDIS, A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF GENERAL CARGO TRUCKS WERE ALLOWED TO PLY THE MASSAWA ROUTE IN CONVOY WITH THE FUEL TANKERS. THIS PROCEDURE PERMITTED LARGE QUANTITIES OF GRAIN, AND SOME SALT, CEMENT, AND INDUSTRIAL RAW MATERIALS TO BE BROUGHT TO ASMARA. ALTHOUGH SUBJECTED TO DELAYS OF UP TO ONE WEEK FOR LACK OF ESCORT TROOPS, THESE CONVOYS RELIEVED SOME LOCAL SHORTAGES AND BROUGHT THE GRAIN PRICES DOWN ON THE CITY. IN EARLY AUGUST, HOWEVER, PERMISSION FOR GENERAL CARGO TRUCKS TO ACCOMPANY THE FUEL CONVOYS WAS ABRUPTLY RESCINDED REPORTEDLY AS A RESULT OF DISPUTES AMONG THE ESCORT TROOPS ABOUT THEIR RIGHT TO SPECULATE AND THE TROOPS' DEMANDS FOR A BONUS PAYMENT FOR THIS DUTY. THE ADDIS-ASMARA CONVOYS LAST DEPARTED AND ARRIVED IN ASMARA IN EARLY JUNE. THIS ROUTE WAS INTERRUPTED FIRST BY THE SKIRMISHES SURROUNDING THE ABORTIVE "PEASANT MARCH", AND LATER BECAUSE OF THE UNAVAILABILITY OF ESCORT TROOPS AS A RESULT OF THE EPMG MILITARY'S DISSAFFECTION IN THE WAKE OF GETACHEW'S DEATH. A CONVOY FOR ADDIS IS NOW BEING ASSEMBLED AND IS EXPECTED TO DEPART THE WEEKEND OF AUGUST 14 DESPITE RUMORS THAT THE INSURGENTS WILL ATTEMPT TO INTERCEPT IT. THE LAST CONVOY TO KEREN, AGORDAT, BARENTU AND TESSENNEY LEFT ASMARA MARCH 31 AND THE LAST IMBOUND CONVOY FROM THE WEST ARRIVED IN MID-MAY. SINCE THAT TIME, THERE HAS BEEN NO CIVILIAN CONVOY ON THAT ROUTE. THE SITUATION HAS REACHED THE POINT THAT SOME PRODUCTS FROM THE ELABERET AGRICULTURAL ESTATE OUTSIDE KEREN ARE NOW BEING BROUGHT INTO ASMARA BY DONKEY.

3. AIR TRANSPORTATION: AIR SERVICE HAS SUFFERED GREATER DISRUPTION IN THE LAST TWO MONTHS THAN AT ANY TIME SINCE OUTBREAK OF INTENSE FIGHTING IN FEBRUARY, 1975. FIRST EAL (THE ONLY AIRLINE TO SERVE ASMARA SINCE THAT LATTER DATE) SUSPENDED ITS THREE-TIMES WEEKLY SERVICE TO MASSAWA ON MAY 31, WHEN A SECOND DC-3 STRUCK AN INSURGENT-PLANTED LAND MINE AND WAS DESTROYED. SECURITY OFFICIALS MAINTAINED THIS BAN UNTIL THEY COULD COMPLETE THOROUGH SECURITY PRECAUTIONS. SEARCHLIGHT TOWERS HAVE BEEN INSTALLED AROUND THE AIRFIELD AND THE RUNWAY HAS BEEN RESURFACED. DESPITE THESE MEASURES, AUTHORITIES CONTINUE TO BE RELUCTANT TO RESUME AIR SERVICE. IT IS NOW CONFIDENTIAL

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REPORTED THAT ADMAS AIR, A SMALL EAL SUBSIDIARY OPERATING SINGLE AND TWIN-ENGINE LIGHT AIRCRAFT, WILL BEGIN SERVICE TO MASSAWA SHORTLY. EAL, HOWEVER, HAS NO INTENTION AT THIS TIME TO RESUME DC-3 SERVICE. SECOND, ON JUNE 19, INTERNATIONAL AIR SERVICE IN AND OUT OF ASMARA WAS SUSPENDED AS A RESULT OF THE EXPLOSION OF A BOMB IN ADDIS WHICH WAS ALLEGEDLY PLANTED IN AN AIR CARGO SHIPMENT ORIGINATING IN ASMARA. AS AN ALTERNATIVE, FOUR 720-B FLIGHTS PER WEEK NOW SERVE ASMARA FROM ADDIS. LOCAL EAL OFFICIALS

ADMIT THAT THIS ALTERNATIVE IS CONSIDERABLY MORE COSTLY THAN THE FORMER INTERNATIONAL SERVICE, BUT THAT THESE DECISIONS WERE MADE BY SECURITY OFFICIALS, NOT EAL MANAGERS. CONCERN OVER AIRCRAFT SECURITY ALSO CAUSED A TEMPORARY CESSATION OF AIRFREIGHT SERVICE BETWEEN ADDIS AND ASMARA. SERVICE WAS RESUMED IN LATE JULY ON CONDITION THAT SHIPPERS DELIVER CARGOES TO EAL AT LEAST 24 HOURS IN ADVANCE. ALTHOUGH A REVISED EAL SCHEDULE EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 1976, LISTS INTERNATIONAL SERVICE TO ASMARA, CANDID EAL AND AIRPORT OFFICIALS AGREE THAT SUCH SERVICE IS UNLIKELY TO RESUME UNTIL "THERE IS PEACE IN ERITREA".

4. SEA TRANSPORTATION: COMMERCIAL SHIPPING INTO MASSAWA HAS REMAINED RELATIVELY CONSTANT IN THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS. OVER THE PRIOR YEAR, HOWEVER, THERE HAS BEEN AN OBVIOUS DOWN-TURN IN SHIP TRAFFIC COMMENSURATE WITH THE SLOWDOWN OF INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION IN ERITREA. THE PRINCIPAL COMMODITY NOW PASSING THROUGH MASSAWA IS REFINED PETROLEUM PRODUCTS FOR ASMARA. TO DATE, THERE HAVE BEEN ONLY LIMITED EFFORTS TO SUBSTITUTE THE COASTAL WATER ROUTE FOR THE MUST MORE VULNERABLE LAND ROUTES. ATTEMPTS TO BRING SCARCE BOTTLED GAS TO ASMARA VIA SEA THROUGH MASSAWA HAVE FOUNDERED FOR LACK OF ORGANIZATION AND INCENTIVE AMONG LOCAL FIRMS. SOME GRAIN AND COTTON HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO ASMARA BY THIS ROUTE, BUT NOT IN SUFFICIENT QUANTITY TO REPLACE RELIANCE ON TRADITIONAL MEANS OF SUPPLY.

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